

Chapter 5

The Housing Task Force: A Case Study

Lloyd Axworthy, 1971

The Structures of Policy-Making in Canada

edited by

*G. Bruce Doern
and Peter Aucoin*

Macmillan of Canada

St. Martin's Press

J

© *The Macmillan Company*
of Canada Limited 1971

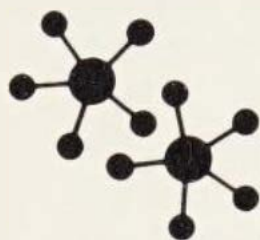
All rights reserved — no part of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who will be permitted to quote brief passages in connection with a review written for inclusion in a magazine or newspaper.

Library of Congress Catalogue Card
no. 79-160063

Printed in Canada by The Bryant Press
Toronto, Ontario,
for
The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited
70 Bond Street, Toronto.

Contents

<i>Introduction — G. Bruce Doern and Peter Aucoin</i>	1
<i>1. Theory and Research in the Study of Policy-Making — Peter Aucoin</i>	10
<i>2. The Development of Policy Organizations in the Executive Arena — G. Bruce Doern</i>	39
<i>3. The Budgetary Process and the Policy Role of the Federal Bureaucracy — G. Bruce Doern</i>	
<i>4. The Role of Royal Commissions and Task Forces — V. Seymour Wilson</i>	113
<i>5. The Housing Task Force: A Case Study — Lloyd Axworthy</i>	130
<i>6. The Role of Functional Advisory Councils — Peter Aucoin</i>	154
<i>7. The Role of White Papers — A. D. Doerr</i>	179
<i>8. The Role of Central Advisory Councils: The Economic Council of Canada — R. W. Phidd</i>	204
<i>9. The Role of Central Advisory Councils: The Science Council of Canada — G. Bruce Doern</i>	246
<i>10. Conclusions and Observations — G. Bruce Doern and Peter Aucoin</i>	267
<i>Bibliography</i>	280



5. The Housing Task

Force:

A Case Study

Lloyd Axworthy

ON JULY 7, 1968, the federal cabinet authorized the Hon. Paul Hellyer, then Minister of Transport, to establish a "Task Force on Housing and Urban Development." The terms of reference for the task force were as follows:

to examine housing and urban development in Canada and to report on ways in which the federal government, in company with other levels of government and the private sector can help meet the housing needs of all Canadians and contribute to the development of modern vital cities.¹

The task force officially came to life on August 29, 1968, when Hellyer announced the names of its members and the scope and nature of its activities. It then began a widely publicized tour across the country. In each of the cities and towns where it stopped, public hearings were organized, visits were made to

housing projects and renewal areas, and discussions were held with people ranging from a world-famous urban planner, Constantinos Doxiadas, who was visiting Canada, to housewives on the doorsteps of their public housing units.

On January 22, 1969, some six months from its starting date, the task force released a seventy-page report containing forty-five recommendations on ways to provide more housing at a lower cost and to improve the development of Canadian cities. Shortly thereafter, Hellyer presented to the cabinet a comprehensive legislative program on housing and urban development based on the task force findings. Three months later he resigned from the government charging that the cabinet was unwilling to take action on his proposals, proposals he considered of prime importance to the domestic well-being of the nation.

This resignation ostensibly brought to a close the short, eventful existence of the Task Force on Housing and Urban Development. As a study of British cabinet practices points out, little is left of a man's influence or ideas once he has resigned from cabinet, and the task force was closely identified with the personality of Paul Hellyer.² But it would be a mistake to let the task force slip from sight, ending up as just another entry in the history books.

A look at what the task force did and how it worked can reveal a good deal about the issues to be faced as we attempt to govern ourselves in contemporary urban society. It can tell us something about how policy is made and who makes it in Ottawa; the changes that are taking place in the functioning of the executive arm of the federal government; the ways in which issues are perceived, information gathered, and solutions prescribed and how government relates to the public in the emerging age of participation and apparent mass democracy.

More fundamentally, the task force experience also raises the question of whether parliamentary government stretched over a federal framework can act as an effective, sensitive agent of social change. There is perhaps no more important question to be asked today. If our system of government is not, and cannot be, an effective system of reform or change, what is the alternative?

The task force thus touched upon an issue more vital than the specific recommendations it proposed. Though mention of it never appeared directly in the report, it was implicitly raising the basic question of whether a democratic system could survive in the kind of urban society that was being created in Canada. In its exposure of the labyrinth-like system of policy-making, the deficiencies in research and experimentation, the frustration of ordinary citizens deprived of power and responsibility to manage their own affairs, the task force pointed to a serious weakness in the capacity of Canadians to cope effectively and democratically with the problems posed by the rapid urbanization of our society.

The purpose of this study is to use the experience of the task force as a starting point for examining at least in part the capacity of the Canadian political system to create a device of policy-making relevant to the demands of our time.

Setting — Housing and Cities

By the summer of 1968 the federal government was under pressure to tackle the increasingly troublesome conditions in the related areas of housing and urban development. For most of the period after the Second World War, federal housing programs under the National Housing Act had underwritten a successful expansionary housing market.³ Production generally kept pace with new demands and the NHA guaranteed mortgage was the magic ingredient that gave the middle class their suburban home. There had been little done in the field of low-income housing, but Canadians were too busy enjoying the postwar boom to be much worried about deteriorating inner cities, urban ugliness, or the plight of the disadvantaged.

The situation began to change in the mid-1960s. Tight money began to pull funds out of the mortgage market and housing production fell. At the same time the surge of postwar babies reached the age where they wanted their own dwellings, causing a significant demand for new accommodation. The increasingly higher costs of housing and the rising interest rates meant that even middle-income families, especially in cities such as Toronto, were unable to purchase homes.⁴ The municipalities were running

short of funds as they tried to keep up with the demand for new services and facilities. Growing awareness of the urban environment, inspired in large part by Canadians observing the deterioration of American cities, added further to the growing climate of concern and criticism.

The federal government was ill-prepared to meet these new demands. In the autumn of 1967 the Pearson government forestalled a major debate in the House of Commons by promising a federal-provincial conference on housing. The conference, held in December 1967, was a disaster. The proposals presented by the federal government were scorned by the provinces as being meaningless, and the provincial premiers left a day early deciding that if the sum total of the federal government's thinking about the problem was to set up a Council on Urban Affairs, then they could better spend their time at home. The conference revealed that existing federal programs were not sufficient to meet the current housing problems, and that the supply of new ideas for coping with conditions in the city was sadly depleted.⁵

It is curious why federal government officials responsible for housing and urban policy had not responded sooner to the problems in housing and the new generation of urban issues. One reason was that at the cabinet level interest in housing and urban development had been virtually non-existent. Responsibility for management of these issues was a part-time job, passed with great frequency to a variety of ministers who all carried other portfolios, and usually treated the task with irritation when it was dealt with at all. Therefore, no minister really saw it as an issue in which he would invest much of his time or political energies. In fact, one could say that in general there were very few political people in the government concerned with the issue. The dispensing of legal work on Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) mortgages was an attractive patronage plum, but beyond that, federal cabinets made little effort to establish cogent policies for housing and urban development.

As a result, CMHC was left virtually alone without too much prodding from the politicians. Over the years the corporation had developed an efficient organization for servicing mortgages and

providing assistance for programs introduced on urban renewal, public housing, sewage treatment and research. As is true with all well-run organizations, it was quite satisfied with the smooth functioning of its operation and did not engage, as few organizations do, in continuing self-appraisal and review. Neither was there really any other source of outside appraisal or generator of new ideas with sufficient expertise or information to challenge or question its performance. The provincial housing corporations were all quite new and tended in any event to be staffed with ex-CMHC men who shared many views in common with their former colleagues. Even if they did differ, they were not apt to be too contrary in public to the organization that paid for most of their programs. As well, there were very few urban experts or urban study centres in the universities, and they certainly did not provide much critical comment. The Ottawa-based lobby and pressure group organizations which had an interest in urban matters, such as the Canada Welfare Council and the Federation of Mayors, were also closely linked to CMHC and the ruling structure of the federal government, and contented themselves with making annual pleas for more money or more public housing, goals also shared by CMHC. So, in effect, there was a closed system of policy-making populated by a small number of men who over the years had become well acquainted with one another and with each other's views. Alternatives to this tightly linked network of policy-making might have been provided by politicians in Ottawa, but they expressed little interest in the issues.

The slowness of government to respond to all the danger signals that kept flashing from the urban areas in this period highlights the question of government's capacity to be a successful instrument of change. When there is a virtual monopoly of information and skill exercised by government, and when there are no independent or competing sources of ideas or policy, then it leads invariably to a situation where response and reaction to change is too slow to be useful, if it happens at all.

The work of the task force was further complicated by the general state of federal-provincial relations. The emergence of the issues related to urbanization and housing occurred at a critical

point in the continuing Canadian struggle between federal governments and provinces, and at a sensitive point in the relations between French- and English-speaking Canada. National unity was the first priority of the new government, and constitutional change its preoccupation. Every other issue was measured in terms of its bearing on the delicate negotiations and relationships in re-ordering unity and restructuring Confederation.

The problems associated with housing and urban development, involving as they do major questions of inter-governmental relationships, ran cross-current with the Trudeau government's desire to work out proper boundaries of respective provincial and federal responsibilities. Trudeau, though a federalist, did not believe in an aggressive, activist role for the federal government and felt that the federal government had a minimal role in the cities.⁶ He, and other ministers from Quebec, were therefore not going to encourage new federal policy initiatives in housing, especially when it would be bound to upset the provinces and make negotiations more difficult.

A basic fact of Canadian government thus is reaffirmed. Efforts at social change through government policy must take second place to the requirements of keeping the federal system together. Several extra sets of hurdles, all the more difficult to jump in these days of activist provincial premiers, and the prickly nationalist feelings of Quebec, are in the way of every proposal for change. New social policy must therefore also have a built-in strategy for coping with our peculiar federal fact. Programs and responses to issues cannot be judged simply on what is the best answer, but what is also capable of being accepted by all the different governments.

The Task Force on Housing and Urban Development

In the first days of the Trudeau administration, a number of task forces were set up to review a host of matters ranging from unemployment insurance and welfare policy to the post office and amateur sports. The most prominent and publicized of them all was the one set up under the Minister of Transport, Paul Hellyer.

In the new government, Hellyer achieved what he had long sought — the responsibility for housing and urban policy. After the 1968 election, he was given ministerial responsibility for CMHC in addition to the Transport portfolio. He also received agreement from the Prime Minister to launch a task force to investigate housing and urban development. He proceeded then to establish in his own office a separate organization to assist in the administration of housing and urban affairs programs, using the summer months to assemble a staff and make plans for the task force which was scheduled to begin activity in the fall.

CONDUCT AND OPERATION

At the outset, Hellyer made several important decisions on the format and conduct of the task force, which were to be highly important in shaping the outcome of the operation.⁷

The first was the demand for speed. Hellyer believed that serious breakdowns were occurring in the Canadian housing market and felt that extensive legislative action would have to be taken by the government before the 1969 construction season to correct the flaws. Particularly pressing was the need for financial measures that would direct sufficient funds into housing to meet the projected annual demand for some 200,000 units. The schedule was to be a tight one. The task force would complete its work inside of six months, giving the government time to legislate the desired changes by the spring of 1969.

The task force was designed, therefore, as an instrument to deal with an immediate problem, as well as to formulate a longer range program. This pressure of time, however, meant that little in the way of basic research could be commissioned. It was felt that available resources and research would suffice to give a basic analysis of the situation and that the task force need not provide answers to all problems, only point out those that needed lengthier review. There was an obvious risk in such an approach. Critics would have the opportunity to latch on to those problems that were left unanswered, and obviously some factors would be overlooked. This would have to be balanced against the merit of developing policy and programs that were topical. A serious fail-

ure of present government practices is time lag. By the time officials perceive an issue, get the policy machinery moving, and implement a program, chances are the issue has gone through several new phases and the program does not fit. A task force that seeks to be relevant can at least match its formulations to existing problems — preferring to be partial in its recommendations than to be badly out of date.

A task force operation working to meet immediate issues can also be effective if there exists a body of applied research to draw upon.⁸ Then, it is simply a matter of sifting through evidence and applying what has been found. Unfortunately, in the case of the housing task force, the state of urban research, particularly policy research, was dismal. When it came to asking academics for answers, what came back was opinion, conventional wisdom based on what the Americans or Swedes were doing, or requests for new research grants, but very little in the way of recommendations for new actions based on hard analyses of Canadian conditions. Thus, the government lacked an alternative pool of knowledge to draw upon. How much there is to draw upon is directly dependent on how much has been previously invested in problem-solving research. The capacity of the housing task force to develop comprehensive solutions was impaired by the lack of this kind of knowledge and the shortage of basic data relating to urbanization, the housing market and other serious conditions in the cities.

Even with these limitations, the task force succeeded in covering much of the ground, and listening to a good many of the experts. The logistics of canvassing an entire country were complicated, but the task force was able to visit some 27 communities, read 500 briefs, listen to 250 oral presentations, attend a number of public meetings, and hold discussions with a number of government officials.⁹ The three-and-a-half-month tour gave time for numerous discussions and arguments among task force members so that by the end of the schedule a synthesis of approach and ideas took place. And, true to his intention, Mr. Hellyer had a report within six months and recommendations to the government shortly after.

A second critical decision concerned the organization of the task force. The membership of the task force and its terms of reference were based on what Hellyer conceived as a form of "jury" operation. Members of the task force were chosen in good Canadian fashion on the basis of geography and on the different skills in various disciplines they could bring. But the minister carefully avoided selecting individuals who were acknowledged as "wise men" in the field. The idea was to bring together a group of people who were not identified with existing policies, who had not fought battles to introduce public housing or urban renewal, or who were not closely tied with the "in" system of experts who occupied senior membership in the network of groups and associations that had formed the fraternity of policy influentials on housing matters over the years. Hellyer felt that if there was to be real reform, and just not a regurgitation of the same answers that had been offered over the years, a more objective group was required. They could sit back and ask hard questions without feeling particularly committed to any existing scheme. This did not mean that task force members were without views, nor was Hellyer himself. It simply meant that being outside the network, members of the task force might evaluate what had been produced by the existing system more effectively.¹⁰

As useful as this might have been from a policy-making point of view, it created difficulties from a political point of view. There is no question that the housing influentials in the on-going policy structure felt snubbed. Since none of their respected members were on the task force, how could there be confidence in its findings? As well, aside from one CMHC official who acted as liaison and took little part in the proceedings, there was little direct participation from the corporation. They prepared research papers and were very efficient and useful in helping to organize the task force tour. But they had little direct input. Hence, there was real separation between the task force and those individuals who had long presided over housing and urban policy. This caused resentment and suspicion by those excluded and their response to the task force was coloured by these feelings.

Another group of interests not represented on the task force

were the provincial or municipal governments. During the course of task force hearings, conversations were held with provincial ministers responsible for housing, with many mayors and local government officials, and briefs were received from most cities. These were quite sufficient in presenting the arguments of the other levels of government. But the task force was looked upon by several officials in provincial governments as a federal show and thereby lost some of its legitimacy. It also gave some provinces the chance to disassociate themselves from the findings, as they could claim no involvement with the deliberations of the task force.

This points to another set of difficulties for policy-making. Because most contemporary issues cannot be divided into neat compartments, respectively assigned to each level of government, what mechanism is available and most suitable for generating new policy formulations? The approach of the housing task force was to use the advocacy approach. One government sets forth a set of propositions to which other levels of government can then respond and issue their own alternatives. There is also the approach of the constitutional conferences where there is some attempt at joint discussion and formulation at the official level, followed by the advocacy proceeding in formal and constitutional meetings. Then, there is the approach of having a truly combined policy-initiating commission, representative of all levels of government. The problem with this approach is how to select representatives, and whether the members would act as spokesmen for their respective government, or engage in a collective enterprise of investigation.

The approach used by the task force was probably the best one available under the circumstances. The problems inherent, and the time involved in working out a task force that would have involved all levels of government, would have set back the actual undertaking to a point where its work and findings would have been irrelevant. The housing task force could not afford to be an experiment in federal-provincial policy-making, along with all the other things it was attempting to accomplish. It would have been greatly aided, however, if there had been a functioning inter-governmental mechanism that had been addressing itself to the

problems of jurisdiction, constitutionalism and federal-provincial-municipal relationships in the field of housing and urban affairs.¹¹ A decision to establish such a body was one of the few outcomes of the 1967 federal-provincial housing conference, but it was not functioning at the time of the task force. Therefore, aside from one paper commissioned to study the federal-provincial implications of its findings, the task force made little reference to the complicated question of how its findings could be implemented inside the constitutional framework. This would be a source of many problems when it came to the federal cabinet's discussion of the report.

A NEW MINISTERIAL POWER

The Minister of Transport proceeded right from the start on the basis that he would be the chairman of the task force, be present at its hearings and deliberations, and quite naturally exercise a strong influence on the findings. This was a radical departure from normal practice. The tradition, whether with task forces, royal commissions, and even the bureaucratic policy process itself, is for the cabinet minister to stay aloof, or at least separated from the working body.¹²

The reasons are obvious. A policy initiation body can come forth with recommendations that may be unacceptable to the cabinet. The minister to whom the task force or advisory body reports, simply passes the report on to cabinet. The government is thus in no way committed to the findings, except to study them; nor is the individual cabinet minister. He may personally be in favour and argue so in the confines of the cabinet room. But publically he is disassociated, and if cabinet does not accept the recommendations, he is not forced to resign. Even in the case of the task force on foreign ownership, where Walter Gordon was clearly associated with the issue and where he undoubtedly exercised an informal influence on its deliberations, he did not become an official part of the body. All this is done in the name of cabinet solidarity.

Interestingly enough, at the outset of the task force, there seemed to be little questioning of Hellyer's participation by other members of the government. Hellyer himself believed that he had

been given a mandate to create a new policy and felt that his leadership of the task force would insure results that he could personally endorse and submit as recommendations for government action. Yet he was in effect creating something of a brand new instrument of policy-making, one that went beyond the conventional functions assigned to royal commissions or other task forces.¹³ It was not a body separated from government, not a semi-independent investigatory body from which government could divorce itself. It was a grafting on to the executive arm of a personal ministerial policy-making body — an extension of the office of the cabinet minister that was not the civil service. It endowed the minister with a new set of powers of investigation, public accessibility, and intellectual skill. It, in effect, changed the role of the cabinet minister in several important ways. It gave him new resources for competing with the expertise of the bureaucrat, it widened his powers as a policy initiator, and thrust him into the position of public advocate for change and reform.

This formation of the task force into a new kind of policy-making body had very visible results. When the task force came to town, it was not headed by some little-known university president, judge or businessman. It was headed by the minister. It was a body with power not just to recommend, but because of the involvement of the cabinet minister, presumably to act. This made a great difference to the proceedings. The presence of Paul Hellyer on the task force gave it an impact and visibility it otherwise would not have had. When people appeared before it they were speaking directly to the man who would introduce new legislation. The extensive publicity that accompanied the task force was not a result just of the seriousness of the issue, but also because the chairman was a senior cabinet minister who was pledging concrete results within six months. The expectations that were thereby created may have been in bad form for those who believed in low-profile politics, but they did indicate that this form of policy-making can stir a response, and make government relatively more accessible to the public. It is putting the power of the office of minister closer to the citizen — close enough that he believes he can directly influence what it does.

This transformation of the task force concept was never articulated at that time; neither the press, the public, or other members of the government fully grasped the significance during the fall months as it criss-crossed the country. Only when the task force report was ready for release in January 1969 was there a reaction. The report itself challenged several accepted ideas; it was not just a repetition of existing policies. Only then did the implications of the task force approach become clear. Here was a controversial report, being made public, with the signature of the responsible minister affixed. Efforts were made by members of the government to alter the timing and form of presentation, but it was too late. The report was released and soon after Hellyer presented to the government a new housing program based on its findings, as he promised he would do six months earlier when the task force began.

Obviously, this use of a task force by a minister ran counter to customary cabinet practice. The cabinet system is not built for that kind of extension of ministerial power, and it was bound to cause problems. The feeling developed that Hellyer had usurped the power of cabinet to decide policy. This might have been looked upon as an aberration, and passed over if it had not been for the fact that the report pushed a strong activist role for the federal government and ran counter to the attitudes of several cabinet ministers on matters of federal-provincial relations. Furthermore, Hellyer had a sense of urgency and pushed for immediate consideration and quick dispatch of his recommendations. These factors combined to make a real issue of the nature and style of the task force, and to set up strong opposition to Hellyer's program.

The longer-range implications of this task force challenge to the existing cabinet system are important. There is increasing discussion of the inadequacies of the present system of cabinet parliamentary government. There are charges by the opposition that Trudeau is creating a presidential system. There are complaints from members of Parliament that they have little influence. There is continuous criticism of the operation of the civil service. And there are even mutterings from ministerial offices that the present team concept is inhibiting.¹⁴

The Hellyer task force was one response to these various complaints about the machinery of government. With all its imperfections, it was one way of giving much more of a role to the responsible elected political leader. It was a way of developing alternative policies from those of the civil service. It was a way of providing some counter-weight to the growing power of the Prime Minister. It was a way of utilizing the position of cabinet minister to give issue leadership and provide direct contact to the public. It thus raised certain critical questions of how well the present system operates and whether or not the new generation of issues demands new methods of executive action.

This does not mean that a totally disorganized system is the answer — nothing would be gained by having cabinet ministers constantly roaming the countryside promoting a random selection of unrelated programs. But it does suggest that perhaps adaptations can be built into the system to permit, with the prior cognizance of cabinet, certain ministerial task forces to operate in a public fashion in those issue areas where such a mechanism would be justified. The resulting recommendations would be the responsibility of the minister, but he need not resign if his full program is not accepted. It would be an acknowledgment by the government that some kinds of problems, especially when they first appear, need the kind of direction a ministerial task force would provide. The question is whether it is worth the effort to develop an instrument of government that can contend with immediate problems with some dispatch, and with a more open form of contact with the public, rather than continue in the present more rigid framework.

PARTICIPATORY POLICY-MAKING

Perhaps the judgment on the above question depends on the evaluation of the task force as a vehicle of participatory policy-making. Though the decision to personally head the task force might have been the most significant from a political and governmental point of view, the decision by Hellyer to take the task force directly to the people might have been the most progressive departure.

There is a growing disillusionment in Canada with the way decisions are made. There is a lack of trust in government, a sterility in the debate of the experts, and a distinct feeling that too many people are left out of those decisions that affect them. Student unrest, wildcat strikes and citizens' movements are the familiar signs. The idea that democracy is not working well in Canada, especially in urban Canada, is very pronounced and there are of course all kinds of explanations based on theories of alienation, anomie, mass society to explain why.¹⁵ That it is happening is a fact, and that institutions such as political parties, representative chambers and bureaucratic structures are not coping with this feeling is another fact. Perhaps the most exciting aspect of the Trudeau phenomenon in 1968, especially to the young and the urban middle class, was his sincerity in calling for a new form of participatory democracy.

The task force on housing had as one of its guiding principles that it would talk to the people. The philosophy was expressed by Hellyer in a speech to the Canadian Real Estate Board during the early days of the task force. He said:

In our Task Force, we are having a look at the country as it really is. Members of the Task Force are having to do what few Canadians are ever forced to do. They are being taken out of their normal routine worlds of teacher, businessman, politician and are having to discover a new world. We are by necessity, day by day, being compelled to shake off our long standing notions and basic prejudices. Through our meetings, our walks in the streets, our tours of apartments, senior citizen homes, and public housing we are being exposed to the inner world of urban Canada.

... We are finding out from people themselves what they think, talking to them in their own neighbourhoods. This is not a Task Force that will make up its mind only through written evidence or expert testimony. We are also absorbing the character of Canadians as they seek to find a decent life in a very complicated urban world.¹⁶

He meant what he said. It began with a public meeting in a suburban middle-class housing development in Ottawa, where over three hundred citizens and task force members engaged in a tough

four-hour question-and-answer session. From that time on the practice was to spend about 50 per cent of the time in each community talking and listening to the views of a great range of citizens. There was the standard procedure of all commissions and task forces — to properly entertain briefs from a variety of groups and experts. But, in addition, there were the multitude of gatherings in public housing projects, walking tours of urban renewal areas, conversations on doorsteps, large open public meetings, and lunches with citizens' groups. It is difficult to measure the number of people who were approached and who offered their views. There were many dramatic episodes — a teenage girl in Regents Park who described her troubles living in public housing, a 6:00 a.m. visit with fishermen in Newfoundland, a tour through some of the bad housing occupied by Indians and Métis in downtown Winnipeg, the angry outbursts of housewives in Thompson, Manitoba, where there were no family homes, and the toughness of the Chinese community in Vancouver who wanted to plan their own urban renewal.

There is no question that this experience had a strong influence on the task force. Time and again it became clear that there was a disparity between views of the people and the views of the experts and the decision-makers. The sociologists would say that what was needed was more public housing, the people who lived in it disagreed. City officials waxed eloquent over the success of urban renewal; people told a different story. Academics said there was not really a housing crisis, people told of their frustration of not finding a good place to live at a price they could afford. It became very clear that the perceptions of the "influentials" who made policy and those of the people were very different, causing task force members to be very skeptical of the advice and information given them by experts and officials.¹⁷

There was also a reciprocal effect on citizens. For the first time for many, they were being asked what they thought. They were given a hearing, an invitation to express what they felt to the man who could decide. Hence, legitimacy was given to various citizens' groups, as Hellyer gave his support to their efforts. One might contend that the phenomenon of citizens' movements across

Canada was given a substantial push by the Hellyer task force. Some critics labelled the task force a travelling circus — perhaps correctly when you consider that circuses attract the attention of a lot of people and get them involved.

This was a healthy happening. It helped the task force reach conclusions that it would never have reached if it had been satisfied to play the conventional game of public hearings, pressure group briefs, and official briefings. It created a vehicle for public participation in policy-making. It was transitory — a one-shot effort — but it tapped a well-spring of opinion, wisdom and experience that rarely penetrates the closed system of decision-making that is endemic with modern government. It has provided a model for succeeding ventures in participatory policy-making, making fashionable, maybe even necessary, efforts to go beyond the circle of those with influence or organizational power to talk to the many kinds of average citizens. The style, approach and method involving people was one of the most important aspects of the task force and one of its major commendations as a new policy device.

OPPOSITION

The task force, when it finally reported, was faced with serious opposition. Some cabinet ministers resented the manner of presentation of the report, and felt that they were being pressured into accepting recommendations because Hellyer had already publicly staked his position on their being approved. The rationale for opposing the recommendations was couched in terms of concern over the activist federal role espoused by the report and over fears that it would disrupt existing programs in urban renewal and public housing. There might also have been elements of personal reaction against Hellyer, especially from newer ministers who reacted to the image of Hellyer as the tough, uncompromising minister of unification days.

This opposition was supported and indeed abetted by members of the old on-going housing fraternity — both within and without the civil service. There were several senior civil servants who had no liking for the Minister of Transport. He had often expressed

his opposition to the rule of the bureaucracy and had fought them in the unification debate. There were others in the government service who had been responsible for some of the programs that the report attacked, and they added their voices to the inside network of opposition.¹⁸

They were joined by spokesmen for various Ottawa-based pressure groups or volunteer organizations that professed interest in the "social" aspects of housing. Their opposition was by far the most irresponsible from the point of view of the task force membership since they often misconstrued the recommendations and intent of the report. Repeatedly the charge was hurled that Hellyer and the task force were against low-income housing. In fact, the report was critical of public housing as a means of providing low-income housing and recommended changing public housing programs. But it also recommended introducing a number of other alternative programs to alleviate the problem of low-cost housing.¹⁹

The other major source of opposition came from certain provincial governments. At a closed federal-provincial conference of housing ministers, held in Toronto in late February, representatives of the larger provinces were against changing federal support for programs of housing and urban renewal. Through the circuit of federal-provincial secretariats and other informal links, these fears found the ears of those in Ottawa who were particularly sensitive to the concerns of the provinces.

Each of these centres of oppositions were not unexpected considering the way the task force contravened established working relationships. The reaction in cabinet, the opposition of the civil service, the antagonism of influential private groups in the network of housing policy-makers, the disagreement by provincial governments revealed the pressure points in the policy-making system. Clearly, any attempts at social change had better encompass strategies to cope with the attitudes and opinions held by those who occupy these critical positions in the system. That is why it is important to consider ways in which political leaders can mobilize public support and create public demand, as it is one counterweight to the power of the bureaucracy and to the

excessive notions of cabinet solidarity. That was one advantage held by the task force. Strong support came from many areas. Many members of the government caucus applauded the task force, particularly those from big cities where the problems were critical, the abuses most pronounced, and where the task force had communicated the government's concern. There was general support from the media and from many individuals who had been crying in the wilderness over the years in their opposition to urban renewal and public housing. The most telling sign was the favourable reaction by the public, especially the hard-pressed and the low-income groups. From the representations and letters received by Hellyer, it was clear that a chord of response had been struck with the many Canadians who were suffering most for lack of good housing and good urban policies. Perhaps a weakness was that such support was not given the time to germinate.

The array of forces designed to delay the introduction of new federal programs won out. Hellyer introduced his program in early February. In mid-April, it was still being shuttled from one cabinet committee to another. Hellyer resigned from the cabinet on April 22.

Assessment

The resignation of Mr. Hellyer did not mean that the work of the task force was a failure — quite the contrary. In the first instance, his departure propelled the government into action and by June 1969 housing legislation was passed by Parliament that incorporated many of the recommendations of the task force.²⁰ many of the other findings of the report are still being acted upon by the government. Robert Andras was given the full-time job of overseeing housing and in 1970 the government announced the setting up of a separate new department to look after housing and urban affairs. Andras has continued the stoppage of urban renewal until more effective programs are developed. He also has offered \$200 million for proposals to better provide low-income housing, and has begun some changes in public housing policy. He has further commissioned a major study of urbanization which

could gather much of the data that was absent when the task force began its work.²¹

More important, the Hellyer task force sparked beginnings of activity that could bring about even more significant changes in the field of housing and urban development. The task force findings challenged and discredited many conventional wisdoms and exposed the weaknesses in major programs such as urban renewal, land assembly and public housing. They demonstrated the need to find more effective answers and helped to activate serious thinking about what alternative solutions there might be. The task force also gave rise to new political processes centred on urban issues. The recent activity and influence of the citizens' groups can be partly attributed to the credence given such movements in the report and in Hellyer's actions in supporting their efforts. Reform movements in local government were given ammunition by the report. Housing and urban development have become major planks in Mr. Stanfield's opposition to Mr. Trudeau. And, even in Mr. Trudeau's own caucus, there are urban-based M.P.s who take open issue with the federal government's lack of radical action. These happenings cannot be ascribed directly to the task force. But the task force unlocked the door and set many of these forces loose; in so doing, it partially fulfilled its ambition to bring about change, even though its report and the minister who sponsored it were turned down by the government. To use the old adage — the first one to breach the barricade is bound to fall, but such an effort makes it possible for others to follow.

Aside from whatever effects the task force might have had in producing new approaches to the problems of housing and urban affairs, its experience raises the more basic question of how prepared is the government in Canada to be an active innovator, an agent for social change. The task force was an instrument of policy-making different from anything the government had tried up to then. It ran contrary to the model of rational, administrative decision-making being applied by the Trudeau government. It provided a prototype of how the power for policy-initiation of individual political leaders can be enhanced and how an alterna-

tive mechanism to the civil service, or the closed interacting systems of bureaucracy and private pressure groups, can be effectively devised. It also provided one way of giving some meaning to the idea of participatory democracy.

In doing this it ran counter to some sacred precepts of the cabinet system of government. It jarred the conservative tendencies of many Canadian decision-makers, both political and bureaucratic, who believe that government should not initiate expectations, but simply receive demands and serve as a broker between competing interests. It also showed the difficulties inherent in our federal system in bringing about programs of social change. Canadians suffer under a multiplication of obstacles in the process of policy-making, and this can be a source of growing frustration in an era of new types of social and economic issues, unless it is brought to an end.

New governmental institutions to deal with the problems of governing a modern society are urgently needed, and this is where the lessons of the task force are important. The task force was not a perfect mechanism, nor was it designed to be an ideal instrument of policy-making. But its experience shows that there are ways government can remodel itself to be open and activist, less bureaucratic, with more participation of people and less dominance by experts. It has shown that perhaps more leeway should be given to political leaders to provide issue leadership, and that the cabinet system should be re-fitted to suit a greater freedom for cabinet ministers.²² It gives encouragement to those who believe that government still may provide a relevant democratic means of making decisions even on complicated issues.

The issue of how government might fill a role of initiation, be a vehicle for legitimately capturing and expressing today's mood of discontent, and be one major source of change is a critical political question. The experience of the task force offers some answers to that question. The value of its experience should be added to other lessons to help form a new theory of how government in Canada can act as an agent of change, keeping step with the pace of events. A look at the task force cannot give the entire picture of what is needed, but it might provide a good start.

Notes to Chapter 5

1. Contained in a letter of transmittal from Paul T. Hellyer to Pierre E. Trudeau as recorded in the Report of the Task Force on Housing and Urban Development, (hereinafter cited as Task Force Report) Queen's Printer, January 1969.
2. See R. K. Alderman, and I. A. Cross, *The Tactics of Resignation* (London: Routledge and Kegan-Paul, 1967), pp. 37-53.
3. The Task Force Report recorded on page 6: "In quantitative and even qualitative terms, the achievements since 1945 are impressive. Forty-nine per cent of the entire housing stock has been built during the period, the highest ratio of new housing additions in the entire Western World. In the years 1945-1968 a total of 2,838,251 new units were built in Canada, 682,276 financed by approved lenders were under the insured lending provisions of the NHA and 371,331 financed directly by CMHC loans."
4. In 1964 and 1965 there was an average of 165,000 housing starts. In 1966 this fell to 134,474. The vacancy rates for apartments in Toronto were 4% in 1966 and in 1968 less than 1%. *Canadian Housing Statistics*, 1968.
 In 1969, the percentage of NHA borrowers from the upper third income group had increased to 44% from 1965 figure of 18%. The percentage of lower income families dropped from 18% in 1965 to 6%, in 1969 based on CMHC housing statistics.
5. The major proposals presented by Mr. Pearson and Mr. Nicholson, then the minister responsible for housing, in their opening statement on December 11, 1967 were:
 - loans for open spaces and transportation corridors
 - an expansion of land assembly programs
 - contributions to the cost of regional planning
 - slightly higher NHA loans
 - a council on Housing and Urban Renewal
6. P. E. Trudeau, *Federalism and the French Canadians*, (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1968), pp. 79-103.
7. An articulation of these can be gathered in statements made by Hellyer in a press conference on August 16, 1968, in a speech delivered to the Canadian Real Estate Board in Niagara Falls, October 7, and in the preamble to the Task Force Report.
8. See Fred Schindeler and C. Michael Lanphier: "Social Science Research And Participatory Democracy in Canada," in *Canadian Public Administration*, Vol. XII, No. 4 (Winter 1969).
9. See Task Force Report.
10. The members of the task force as described in the report

were — "Its Chairman, Transport Minister Paul T. Hellyer, was himself the Minister responsible for federal housing policies. The remainder of its membership was drawn from the private sector, broadly representative of the geographical regions of Canada and of the varied disciplines and backgrounds most intimately involved in the subjects under inquiry. They were Dr. Doris Boyle of Sydney, Nova Scotia, an economist-sociologist on the faculty of Xavier College; ecologist Dr. Pierre Dansereau of the University of Montreal's Institute of Urbanism; W. Peter Carter of Montreal, Mortgage Controller of the Royal Bank of Canada; builder-developer Robert Campeau, President of Campeau Corporation of Ottawa; Dr. James Gillies, a land economist and Dean of the Faculty of Administrative Studies, York University, Toronto; and C. E. Pratt, a senior partner of the Vancouver architectural firm of Thompson, Berwick, Pratt and Partners. William H. Neville of Ottawa was appointed Executive Secretary. The Task Force also was assisted by Alfred E. Coll, Executive Director of Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, as CMHC Liaison Officer and by Lloyd Axworthy, Executive Assistant, (Housing) to Mr. Hellyer."

11. As Bruce Doern points out in his study of royal commissions: "There is, therefore, superimposed on the urgent need for viable general public policy-making technique, all the problems of inter-governmental relations and jurisdiction. This need is on a continuing basis." *Canadian Public Administration*, (December 1967), p. 433.
12. See J. E. Hodgetts, "Should Canada be Decommissioned?" *Queen's Quarterly*, Vol. LXX (Winter 1964), p. 478.
13. For a discussion of the relationship between royal commissions and government see Charles J. Hanser: *Guide to Decision: The Royal Commission* (New Jersey: Bedminster Press, 1965), pp. 114-124.
14. See article by Anthony Westell, "Masses Closer to Government," April 17, 1970, in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, which highlights the criticisms of the existing system of cabinet government.
15. See William Kornhauser: *Politics of Mass Society* (Free Press of Glencoe, 1959); Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man* (New York: Doubleday and Co, 1960); David Apter: *Ideology and Discontent* (Free Press of Glencoe, 1964).
16. Paul Hellyer, "The Face of Our Cities — A Task Force View," a speech to the Canadian Association of Real Estate Boards, Niagara Falls, Ontario, October 7, 1968.
17. See Peter Schrag, "Why Our Schools Have Failed," in Marilyn

Gittell and Alan Hevesi, *The Politics of Urban Education*. Referring to the movement in New York for school decentralization, he said: "It is thus a revolt against the "professionals" — the people who took charge, in the name of reform and good government, and apparently failed to deliver the goods. In its unwillingness to trust the experts, the demand for decentralization is frontier populism come to the city, a rejection of outside planning and expertise." (New York: Praeger, 1970), p. 317.

18. To quote from Anthony Westell: "Its mandarins are little known to the public but widely respected and sometimes feared in the federal service. They are credited by admirers with bringing a new cohesion to government policy-making, and accused by critics of destroying such outside initiatives as Paul Hellyer's housing task force." From "Cabinet Secretariat Now Power Elite," April 14, 1970, *Winnipeg Free Press*.
19. *Task Force Report*, pp. 52-61.
20. The initiatives for the new legislation were presented by the Prime Minister in the debate following Paul Hellyer's resignation and the emergency debate on the government's poor handling of the housing problem. See Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, April 25, 1969, p. 7979.
21. It also is interesting to note that at the 1970 Liberal party policy conference, the resolutions adopted by the convention were almost identical to those of the task force on housing.
22. The example of the foreign policy review, where ministers Kierans and Cadieux publicly took different positions, shows that it is possible to have more freedom within our present system of cabinet government.